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THE WINE OF THE PURITANS

A Study of Present-Day America

BY

VAN WYCK BROOKS

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To
MY BROTHER
C. A. B.

LONDON,
October 1908

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The Wine of the Puritans

CHAPTER I

THE number of the house—Two sorts of founders—The only virtues—"The wildest dreams of Boston"—Emerson—A man of some distinction—The first premise—A very odd fellow, indeed—Mr Rockefeller considered symbolically—Eena, meena, mina, mo—Two childhoods—A bowl of daffodils—"La Patrie"—What we left in Europe.

IT was one of those Italian midsummer afternoons, when to be abroad, they say, is the same thing as to be an American. Back from its little blue bay the quiet village of Baja lay up against a circular slope like a great mossy sea-shell into which twenty centuries had idly tossed their temples and dwellings, half-covering them as they crumbled there in flowering glooms of dusty verdure. Here and there a line of yellow columns stood

out from the vines like rich candles among the silks of a splendid altar. The atmosphere itself seemed to assume a responsibility in the entire absence of any palpable sound or movement, for it perceptibly trembled vibrantly back and forth, murmurous with sparkling insects. It was possible to imagine that this silence had remained to remind one that the voice of Virgil had broken it once, somewhere in the ruins. And in this place it seemed as if civilization had fulfilled itself, as if history had said its last word and closed its book—as if, indeed, the genius of romance had lingered here and grown forgetful of itself and fallen asleep.

I was glad when Græling broke the silence.

"There is something I don't quite like about this. I feel as if a great many things had suddenly come together to brush me out of existence. I think we had better have a discussion!"

As a little ripple broke along the beach we

looked up to see a great black ship moving westward from Naples in the outer bay.

"Another shipload of Italians going to take our places at home," he said. "It's so hard to call it home when you have to stop to recollect the number of the house!"

We could hear the flutter of the American flag irritably tugging away from its pole as the stern withdrew quietly round the point.

"How do you suppose it all came about?"

I think we both determined to have it out then and there.

"Well, to begin with, we have the Pilgrim Fathers."

"The first materialists?" I suggested.

"Quite possibly, but there is something else that comes first. Do you see what I mean when I say that, unlike any other great race, we were founded by full-grown, modern, self-conscious men?"

"How unlike any other race?"

"Well," he replied, "the founders of all the great original races—original in the sense of having dwelt in one peculiar section of the world since before they became civilized and historic peoples—were rude specimens of one or other of the prehistoric types of man, marked off at the moment of their first settlement in their future homes by almost imperceptible, if indeed any, distinctions from the other members of the common type. Settling, as they did, some in Germany, some in France, some in England, they became moulded by the special traits of climate, natural elements, and properties of the lands of their choice. And although there were migrations and invasions and infinite stirrings back and forth of these half-awakened peoples, each race had so far settled itself and taken the colour of its surroundings as to have developed certain distinct racial traits and to have reached a national type inflexible enough to absorb invading peoples and to force its own traits

upon its conquerors: all this before the dawn of its own special historic period. The American type, on the contrary, has evolved in the full daylight of modern history. It was deliberately established by full-grown, intelligent, modern men with a self-conscious purpose, in a definite year."

"But the roots of the old civilization were there."

"Oh, I grant you that the men who landed at Plymouth Rock were Englishmen. Exactly in proportion as the memories of the old tradition grew fainter and fainter, the qualities of a new tradition grew stronger and stronger. The growing American idea displaced the dying English idea. Well, of course the particularly vivid reality of pioneering could hardly find its ideal reflection in the genial traditions they had left behind, and of course they were forced to emphasize for protection the virtues of thrift and industry. And these virtues were for so long

the essential virtues for the economical welfare of the new state that everything else appeared unnecessary beside them. In the course of time they came to be considered the only virtues, while the Puritan point of view, cut off from immediate intercourse with riper points of view, more and more inclined to believe that whatever was not in some way economically necessary was in some way wrong."

"But your term 'economically necessary'?" I asked. "Civilization is not merely for the purpose of sustaining life—that is the premise, the thing assumed, upon which civilization is built up."

"But the Puritans were unable for so long to assume this premise, were forced for so long to concentrate all their energies upon establishing this premise that they accustomed themselves to the idea that sustaining the machinery of life was a kind of end in itself. And so they came to feel suspiciously toward

ritual, pleasure, light-heartedness—all those things which an established civilization can support, as symbols of opposition to the stern economic need."

"And it all remained as a habit long after the need for this materialism had passed, when there were peace and plenty for more gracious purposes?"

"Exactly. One sees in Whittier, Holmes and the rest that preconception of the supreme virtues of thrift and industry, the note of shrewdness and homely comfort, showing that Puritanism had not yet accustomed itself to prosperity or to allowing the unqualified value of anything not essentially and directly connected with the machinery of life.

"But just then something happened. America suddenly ceased to be New England. Nations of foreigners came to our ports desiring to be called American. Now, although we have not produced a national average type——"

"'The wildest dreams of Boston are the facts of San Francisco'!"

"Still the native-born Puritan race is the dominant race everywhere, socially at least, deeply tinged with those Puritan ideals, provincial and material still. The New England idea, adequate for a small province, naturally became inadequate for the expression of a great nation. Adapted as this idea was to the needs of a frugal, intellectual people whose development was strictly intensive rather than extensive, it was unable to meet the needs of great prosperity, imperialism and cosmopolitanism. The New Englander carried his philosophy to California and sought to adjust his great prosperity to it, just as he carried it to Europe and insisted on interpreting history through its medium. In both cases, of course, the large need* could not adapt itself to the small interpretation. Now

* *See* Appendix.

the philosophically inclined New Englander, finding that he could give no rational explanation of the world in accordance with the New England idea, turned aside into Transcendentalism. It seems to me that Emerson and his following represent the despair of explaining the world in general (which had opened to them) by the rational philosophy they were accustomed to apply to the provincial life of New England in particular. And so they threw aside the hope of any rational explanation at all and sought to interpret life in arbitrary and purely spiritual terms. Emerson is a lofty and inspired sophist who begs the whole question of life, and whose sophism is the direct result of a provincial training, rational as an explanation of the peculiar life of one corner of the world, but inadequate to explain life in the wider sense."

"You put the old wine into new bottles," I suggested, "and when the explosion results,

one may say, the aroma passes into the air and the wine spills on the floor. The aroma, or the ideal, turns into transcendentalism, and the wine, or the real, becomes commercialism. In any case one doesn't preserve a great deal of well-tempered, genial wine. The other day I came across a passage in Mr Riis's 'Theodore Roosevelt the Citizen' suggesting how admirable it was in the latter to have made up his mind to work just the same, although, as a young man, he had means to be idle. This really implies that the average man is almost justified in ceasing to exist, so far as the welfare of the world is concerned, if he has a comfortable income, or at least that if he goes on working just the same, his work is to be taken not as a matter of course but as a distinct credit to him. He is *ipso facto* a man of some distinction. Now it seems to me that to imagine that the ideals and purposes one carries in one's head are dependent upon

ups and downs of outer fortune is to be preoccupied with the material side of the question."

"It means," said Græling, "that the first attention must still be given to keeping life well-fuelled and well-fed; that, in short, American civilization has not yet learned to accept the machinery of life as a premise. Your business man cannot believe that he has gathered together enough money to support this machinery a hundred times over, but goes on making money in the honest conviction that it is necessary for him to do so. And deeper than this, he really loves his business—which means that he loves the machine for itself more than for what it produces. Now, of course, until you have accepted this premise you cannot accept easily and naturally any of the things that are built on this premise. You cannot, in short, accept the arts of life. You can be enthusiastic and extravagant about them but you cannot accept

them as perfectly normal, natural elements of civilized life. Enthusiasm in these matters usually implies strangeness and unfamiliarity. . . . It is all a matter of economics."

"Why, we look upon everything from an economic standpoint! Do we not allow religion and recreation and literature their place in our economic system? Do we not condescend to allow life itself an economic value, the office hour being the real criterion by which we measure these things and to which we accommodate them all? We take our exercise, not primarily because we love exercise but because we can do our work better for it. We read, not primarily because we love reading, but to rest our minds from our work. We are conscious toward art and literature, never accepting them as a perfectly normal part of life, but as things to 'go in for' or to 'blow ourselves to'. Or at least we insist upon their economic or their moral value—

those sides of art which appeal to the instinct of the machinery, because we have not the instinct of art itself which is concerned primarily with the æsthetic value. We do not care for these things for their own sakes, but as cogs in the machine."

"Fielding has a remark somewhere," said Græling, "that 'whenever a philosopher appears among us he is distinguished by the name of an odd fellow'. Now, an American who takes it into his head to think for a few years, and refuses to recognize the mechanical instinct as the most important instinct, is distinguished, heaven knows, by the name of a very odd fellow indeed; or else he is overloaded with ill-advised luxury, and sent over to Europe by a prosperous father who wishes him to have all the advantages which he himself was denied. In no case does he seem to fit in anywhere at home, to be accepted easily and gratefully as if his work were perfectly

legitimate and essential to civilized life. We hardly feel that art is altogether legitimate—there is something odd about it. We do not feel, for instance, that the artist, the man who creates, is as illegitimate a type as the broker, the man who negotiates. 'Poetry and imagination, the portion of a very small number of idlers',—do you remember in Chateaubriand?—'are regarded in the United States as puerilities appertaining to the first and to the last ages of life. The Americans have had no childhood, and have, as yet, had no old age'."

"That's it, America has had no childhood—in America. We left our childhood in the old world, and the moral and physical struggle to survive in a new country, left neither time nor heart for the cultivation of those instincts and sensibilities which produce a genial superiority to the hard facts of life. Mr Rockefeller—there is a parallel to the whole story.

Reared in barren hardship among surroundings that allowed no play of the imagination, he grew up to manhood and to middle-age with the one fixed idea that he must conquer his circumstances and make easy the material side of life. He put poverty at defiance and steadfastly willed himself to become rich. Well, he became rich. But there was nothing left in him to expand into something superior to his riches, and the only happiness that he could know was — to become richer."

"I suppose it is beside the point," said Græling, "to remember that America, unlike Mr Rockefeller, had had her childhood, a forgotten childhood in the old country, full of all the things of the imagination. It seems to me that we Americans come back year after year to the home that we remember with a kind of half-dreaming instinct to revisit with a wistful affection the old

villages and the old haunts of our ancestors. There is something affectionate in our curiosity as we speed about in our brazen motors from Stratford to Devonshire, tooting along the quiet lanes. It's not sight-seeing really. We feel as if we had lived there in a dream sometime, as if one of our great great-grandfathers had lived in every little thatched cottage. We half expect the black sheep to say, 'Yes, sir; yes, sir; three bags full', and to see the cow jump over the moon. And in the still of the evening as we pass by the village cross-roads we hear the children scampering together while the leader counts, 'Eena, meena, mina, mo'. Then something happens. We suddenly remember that this really wasn't our childhood at all. We see the big brick house and the polished lawn where we used to play hide-and-seek, and we hear the full-throated robins calling among the maples. Once more we shout 'last look'

as we clatter up the side steps after begging one more game from good-natured Mary. . . .

"There seem to be two of them and we to have lived them both. I think all Americans have two childhoods, an American childhood and an English childhood, a kind of picture-book childhood that we lived before we were born."

"And do you know our oldest friends are really Englishmen. We can forget everybody we have ever known sooner than Jack who climbed up after the giant:

'Fee, foe, fum;
I smell the blood of an Englishman.'

Now if he had been a Spaniard or an Italian it would have been only a story!"

"And then how we do want to believe that Dr Johnson drank his ale at the 'Cheshire Cheese'!"

"I wonder if we are really English in our hearts and American only in our heads?

Hearts are older than heads. American history is so unlovable!"

"Yes, we cannot find consolation in remembering our American forebears until we are grown-up. Their virtues and sentiments were those of grown-up, fully awakened men and women, developed and adapted for a special and temporary situation. A child must fight and kill a great many giants and live a very long time in the greenwood before he can have an appetite for Indians. The founders of the old races were children themselves, and as children possessed of qualities not biased and stressed and prejudiced for any special temporary situation, and so never obsolete or ill-adapted to any situation. The old myths that spring out of the childhood of an ancient race must have their message for every succeeding generation, because they represent general racial traits and ideals, and are wider than

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any special application of them. And this is because those myths sprang up while the race was determining its traits, and before its historic epoch applied those traits to special episodes of self-conscious life. Any virtue or any myth which sprang out of one of these later episodes, and illustrated the requirements of the special situation as distinguished from the general character of the race in all times and situations, ceased to be illuminating when the episode was past. That is why the most ancient legends of a race survive and seem ripe for all times and situations, while the stories that spring out of particular events so soon become only food for antiquaries."

"I think I see. A child's comments on what one is doing are never harsh—never seem to be irrelevant. They are so delightfully general, there is nothing specialized about them. It is the kind of criticism which one receives from a bowl of daffodils

them as perfectly normal, natural elements of civilized life. Enthusiasm in these matters usually implies strangeness and unfamiliarity. . . . It is all a matter of economics."

"Why, we look upon everything from an economic standpoint! Do we not allow religion and recreation and literature their place in our economic system? Do we not condescend to allow life itself an economic value, the office hour being the real criterion by which we measure these things and to which we accommodate them all? We take our exercise, not primarily because we love exercise but because we can do our work better for it. We read, not primarily because we love reading, but to rest our minds from our work. We are conscious toward art and literature, never accepting them as a perfectly normal part of life, but as things to 'go in for' or to 'blow ourselves to'. Or at least we insist upon their economic or their moral value—

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is at bed-rock and he believes in bed-rock."

"Exactly. He has not what one might call racial preoccupations. Our problems are all comparatively new and comparatively simple. We have none of those complex and diseased social problems which have grown old and so embedded themselves in the fibre of European life that they have got beyond the power of rational reform, just as cancer may pass beyond the reach of the surgeon, even when the surgeon can tell exactly what the matter is. There is in European societies an accretion of twenty centuries of experience, bound up with prejudice and instinct incalculably complex, which expresses itself in a silent sense of fatality. A kind of melancholy and sombre reminiscence seems to brood over human life which connects these peoples with the mysteries of evolution, and which revives in them the great sorrows

and longings, the struggling desire for expression of that brute creation out of which, through infinite gradations of labour and the action of the elements, they have come forth. Of course there is something inarticulate about them, some intermingling of that instinct which is the intelligence of long dead generations with the intelligence of their own generation, something that restrains them from entire frankness and self-confidence, that makes them shy——"

"—Something that makes and keeps them children."

"But we Americans have no bonds with a remote antiquity, no traditions of the soil old enough as yet to have become instincts. As Chateaubriand expressed it in a marvellous phrase: 'We left our childhood and our youth in Europe'. Our only ancestral memories of the old race are like a dream we dream in our childhood and then forget.

In Europeans, unlike ourselves, we find a vivid sense of mystery in life—

> 'Blank misgivings of a creature
> Moving about in worlds not realized'—

a something which prevents them from accurately methodizing all their actions and from solving their problems merely by taking thought. But because most of our problems arose from events easily understood by the modern mind and in the clear noonday of modern life, we can hope, to some considerable extent, to solve those problems by purely rational reform. We are not hampered in our work by any 'echoes of an ante-natal dream'. If we have not the splendour and the grace of Europe nor their converse the pessimism of Europe, if we have not that note of diseased inheritance and social decay—Hauptmann, D'Annunzio and Mæterlinck, if we seem born into the world curiously without instincts, we have at least—reason, rationalism."

CHAPTER II

What we have kept—The kindling of instinct—Ingenuity—On the surface—Instinct or conviction?—Tones and words — The labour-saving principle—"Just about as good"—whitewashed elephants—Pioneering and turtle-soup—Threadbare—"Recreation from hard work"—Stilted sympathies—Derelict machinery—Two views of Mr Rockefeller—The correct street—Permanent impermanence—The pastime called "Exposure"—Morning paper conversation — The Simple Life and blue silk—Over the telephone—Louis XI and President Buchanan.

"YES," I said, "and our American rationalism is a disease."

"Just how a disease?"

"Well, as an example, take our prominent trait of ingenuity. We enjoy putting together the machinery and inventing labour-saving machines for the sheer pleasure of the thing. We devise every possible short-cut toward the finished product because we feel that labour itself has no virtue, and because we

are more interested in the cleverness of the machine than in the quality of the article it produces. We feel that if we have invented some ingenious device our ingenuity alone gives it a reason for existence. There are many men who spend their lives devising ways of avoiding labour when true happiness is apt to result from the labour itself. This is an example of rationalism recoiling upon itself and becoming intellectually morbid."

"But what do you mean in saying that this is an example of 'rationalism recoiling upon itself'?"

"Well, you cut away, at least to some very considerable extent, a man's instincts, and what is left?—mind. He thinks. He understands his position as if he had been dropped full-grown out of the clouds. He is a rationalist. He does not feel this and that to be true because tradition has proved them so. He is independent of tradition; he has to think it all out

for himself. Now of course reason is only a method, a means to an end. He knows that life ought to consist of instincts and emotions. He knows that while there ought perhaps to be nothing in life which reason cannot explain, there are many things in life whose rationality must be taken for granted, and whose significance depends upon the spiritual or emotional superstructure raised above the rational foundation. He knows that one should think until one has established a true basis for feeling, and that then one should feel. That feeling, that impression is the reaction of the mind upon the heart, the kindling of instinct, and that must be left inviolate as soon as one can feel that it has a logical basis, if it is to produce any emotional reaction. To maintain the rational attitude toward something which is already rationally established is to prevent the spiritual superstructure and to uproot the incipient instinct. Plant your seed rightly and then leave it alone

or it will never come to blossom. Now the American, as it seems to me, is always asking in regard to politics, art, religion: 'How can I be sure that I have planted the seed rightly?' Well, and how can anybody be sure? We must take some things for granted and have faith, if any instincts are to grow out of our reason. The American is on his guard against the unexplainable. He is suspicious of anything for which he cannot find the immediate reason. He drags out his instincts every now and then to look them over and see if they are thoroughly sensible. He does not allow them time to melt together and form in him a background and a reserve. There is a danger that in America the rational point of view will become an end instead of a means, an instinct itself instead of an instrument for explanation. One sees signs everywhere of an impatience with the seeds even when they are—so far as one can judge—rightly planted, and a feeling

that the planting of the seeds and not the gathering of the blossoms is the chief matter. And the expression of this morbid rationalism is found in that ingenuity which produces a sense of pleasure in the very workings of reason for their own sake rather than for what they accomplish. The American, perpetually driven to explaining the reasons of things, makes a religion of the mechanism."

"I fancy that it is this insistently rational attitude which gives to Americans that curious appearance of being always on the surface, and which suggests a certain transparency in all our thoughts and acts, as if, indeed, we had behind us no complex undercurrent of social relations. This transparency exhibits itself in the facility with which we throw out final judgments on matters that go back into the most impenetrable recesses of the human consciousness. It is usually possible, I have found, for an American to explain in perfectly measured words why he

is of a certain mind in politics or religion. He is able to discuss these questions intellectually and to tell you why he laughs at certain things, why he believes or enjoys certain things. In the keen play of his intelligence one hardly finds the subtler play of instinct, just as in artistic matters he has not, what I should call, an instinctive perception, but only an intelligent or rational perception."

"And I think," I added, "that our political parties can hardly be said, except perhaps in the South, to represent traditional instincts in the sense in which the Liberals and Conservatives in England represent traditional instincts. An American who is a Democrat to-day may vote the Republican ticket to-morrow if he prefers the Republican candidate, and the son of a socialist may become a capitalist if his income so allows him. Even if one is a Republican by conviction, and even if one's family has remained Republican for generations by conviction,

Republicanism in America is not old enough as yet to have grown from a conviction into an instinct."

"It all reduces itself," said Græling, "to one statement—we take nothing for granted. Supposing that the human heart is the treasury in which the mind has stored away its discoveries, one by one, age after age: a little dust has fallen through the chinks, and the thoughts and reasons stored away there have melted together into a gathered mass no longer separable to the eye. So long as that mass is left intact heart remains heart and not mind, and is capable of emotions not readily explained by the mind. Just so it seems to me that a civilization can only become mellow when it has learned to assume that many things capable of logical explanation depend for their value upon not being explained, that the potential explanation must be taken for granted, and one's attention devoted to the emotions built upon it. In order

to love or enjoy or believe anything we must forget for the moment what love and enjoyment in themselves really are. We must feel a mystery in these things which cannot be quite explained.

"We are civilized, as it seems to me, in proportion to the amount we are able to presuppose. Highly civilized men who meet for the first time are able to appreciate in a second how much they can infer between themselves. They speak by allusions, and a single ejaculation is so modulated as to convey the essence of ten minutes' talk between less civilized men. A civilized man does not judge so much from words as from tones: one can put an untruth into words so as to simulate truth, while a tone cannot be disguised. Words can be measured and understood and looked at top and bottom and all sides: there is in a tone something of the mystery, the——one hardly knows what. And just as it is with civilized men, so it is with

civilized peoples. Even supposing that in the one case psychology may be able to explain the tone, and in the other case the emotion or perception or reverence toward art or religion, it is none the less true that civilization, to a certain degree, seeks the esoteric, the hidden, and veils itself in a reserve. It is not transparent; it is moved by gestures and expressions too fine to be explained, by tones rather than words. It is this forbearance in the presence of spiritual things, this deliberate refusal to analyze the analyzable which produces reverence and instinctive perception."

"Exactly," I said, "and ingenuity works against the establishing of this forbearance and this reserve. Ingenuity is valuable as a means to an end, but whenever we find ourselves enjoying a means we are destroying our appetite for the end. The very idea that any kind of labour-saving device justifies its own existence implies that labour is a thing

in all cases to avoid as far as possible—where, indeed, the inventor has any aim ulterior to reducing his own personal expenses as an individual manufacturer. The labour-saving principle simply means that labour is a thing to be short-cut, compressed, and dispensed with as far as possible, and that if individual happiness is the outcome of individual labour —well, then, happiness must be sacrificed more and more to progress."

"And that is precisely what most inventors are prepared to admit. Of course it ignores that indefinable difference between the machine-made and the hand-made, which represents the heart of the individual workman; of course it ignores the element of the unexplainable in hand-made work, that curious product of human ambition and pride called quality. But why is it that in America, where we have produced only one great composer and only one or two great painters, we have produced a

dozen ingenious devices for manufacturing music and pictures, which are, as we say, 'just about as good' as the true things? It is because most of us are quite content with the substitute. Nor does this contentment with something 'just about as good' stop at music and pictures and other—machine-made goods. . . . We want everything in the form of a pill, a substitute. We take a pill instead of taking exercise. We want our literature reduced to 'snappy' paragraphs, we want what we call culture in the form of capsules—half-hour readings and lectures between the intervals of our more serious business, because we feel that somehow we ought to have these things, and we want to get through with them in as short order as possible. 'The public wants to be fooled', said Barnum, when someone remonstrated with him for exhibiting a white elephant which he had whitewashed himself. He was perfectly right. So long as the

elephant is white, we are not greatly concerned how he came by his colour."

"And then," I added, "do you remember not long ago when Mr Roosevelt praised a certain poet—I can't recall his name, everyone took it for granted that he was a very great poet and bought him and admired him? It is one of our curious assumptions that a man who has reached eminence in one field is competent to pass judgment in all fields. If we had learned to discriminate in poetry, if we had cared about poetry, we should probably have surmised that we were as good judges in that particular matter as Mr Roosevelt. But as a nation we have not trained ourselves to discriminate quality in anything sufficiently to allow us to hold our own judgment in opposition to the judgment of anyone who has a name, though the name were made in pioneering and the subject in question be turtle soup. . . . We walk

through an art gallery and admire every picture in it, and then go to a concert and applaud every piece equally, and both pictures and music straightway pass out of our heads. All of which results from our endless search for the means of making better things, endlessly ignoring the things made."

"I suppose in a sense it is a form of idealism, if everything is idealism which is persistently unsatisfied with its results."

"But that begs the whole question of modern life. Looked at in one way life itself is a compromise with reason. Supposing that we are all in search of the highest economy of life. And supposing that that economy accepts every discovery of science as one more stone in a foundation, an absolute, upon which we may firmly stand in order to learn what man really is, to understand the relations between men, and little by little to raise the racial average. Well then, every moment that

we delay, tasting of the quality of things, allowing the most momentary and the most refined expression of the senses, we are countenancing by just so much a stage of existence only imperfectly true; while reason is revealing more and more of the absolute, in psychology and biology, so long as we sacrifice the happiness of its reactions upon ourselves in a thirsty, unresting pursuit of it. . . . But not one man in a thousand is fitted for this part. The great mass of men must always be preoccupied with life itself and the present. They ought to absorb the quality, the spiritual value of life. If there were no need for the spiritual besides the rational, to what futile end would the rational lead us? We ought to believe that the game is worth the candle, and to make it so. Where a whole race is immersed in mechanics the quality of life and its arts is forgotten, and the national point of view—so far as there can be

any — becomes curiously threadbare. That seems to me the danger and in a measure the result of our universal ingenuity."

"In what way would you say that American life is threadbare?"

"That for most of us living means getting a living. We never think what life is—we are continually intent upon what life brings. If we stop and wonder whether life is worth living or not we are quite unable to decide until we recall our social engagements and our business enterprises, and then we probably conclude that life is well enough. But this is because we are thinking of our engagements and enterprises and not of life at all."

"I have often noticed that an American business man, who is forbidden by his doctors to work, ceases to have a place in the universe. I have seen him at his summer hotel of a week-end watching the stock-ticker in the office. As a rule he has not that sense of

power which keeps a Morgan or a Rockefeller from being quite sordid. Perhaps he takes his rest now and then and makes a holiday—which consists of a good cigar, a good hotel, and the best seat in the theatre. Whenever he goes to the theatre he makes the excuse of 'recreation from hard work' to see nothing but vaudeville and light opera, and whenever he reads he makes the excuse of 'recreation from hard work' to read nothing but poor novels and wretched magazines. That kind of hard work has really destroyed his taste for anything better: when his distractions are taken away and he has only himself to enjoy, he can do nothing but light a cigar and be irritable. He has never lived in himself at all. . . . It never occurs to him that the clouds are floating over his head. I am sure there is less happiness in America than in any other country in the civilized world. And it is because we associate happiness with spending money."

"Yes. These Italians come to us to gain prosperity and to lose everything else. They find in our life no freshness, no natural gaiety, no holiday-making, no splendid moments, none of the life they knew at home—a splendid, passionate life of elemental emotions —susceptible to every tremor of the senses. How soon they forget that they were once delighted by a ribbon or a song!"

"It really reduces itself," said Græling, "to the proposition that if we are to consider poverty and happiness to be incompatible, to that extent we assume prosperity and happiness to be synonymous. It is hard indeed for us to take the simple present as it stands, and to look at it and think about it, to expand, to sympathize, to enjoy, to grow human, deep, genuine, serene.

"Naturally enough we judge of a man by his activity. So long as a man is busy we seldom ask whether he is busy to any

distinct and good purpose—we instinctively feel that he is right. This nervous activity, largely for its own sake, gives a curious rustiness to the emotions, and I have noticed that the affections and sympathies of many business men are strangely stilted and self-conscious, not so much from egotism as from that hardening of the nature which follows a long suspension of the exercise and free play of the emotions. And we instinctively feel that a man who is not busy is somehow doing wrong."

"I fancy that we so emphasize the value of activity," I suggested, "because it appears to us the outward and visible sign of a much deeper thing, efficiency.

"Efficiency is the well-oiled machinery by which one seeks a particular purpose. But efficiency is surely a bad thing where it has no purpose, and there is in American life, I think, an immense amount of undisciplined,

undirected, clashing, wasted efficiency jarring and vibrating to no purpose whatever — an immense amount of derelict machinery, spinning and tearing at high pressure without the least intention of producing anything. Given the idea that a man must be busy anyway whether he has any purpose in mind or not — in short, that the running of the machinery is the chief matter, it is only natural that efficiency should erect itself from a means into an end. Now it is fair to say, I think, that Mr Rockefeller is one of the unhappiest of living men. He is efficient. He has been nothing else for fifty years. He has made a large fortune. He has ruined his own life. He has ruined thousands of other lives. And when he dies will anybody miss him? Will anybody be honestly able to deny that the world would have been much better if he had never lived? Will there be anything more than a great crash in Wall

Street and a thousand more lives ruined? And yet Mr Rockefeller is an example of efficiency for the sake of efficiency, efficiency directed and controlled for the purpose of being efficient. The really tragic thing about Mr Rockefeller is not so much that he has ruined thousands of lives by doing any definitely wrong and wicked things, not by being an out-and-out criminal—for all that can ultimately be corrected by law. The really tragic thing is that he has ruined his own life by simply living as all American business men live, only a little more so. For what law can correct a point of view?"

"That is one side of the matter," interposed Græling. "The other side everyone knows. He has brought hundreds of millions of dollars into the world which did not exist until he created them, and which will exist when he is forgotten. In his own greed he has unconsciously sacrificed himself to pro-

duce the opportunity for thousands of men to labour and find happiness in labour. And, incidentally, I have known five men who have become artists entirely because their fathers, thanks to Mr Rockefeller, were able to set them free, in the second generation, from this 'habit of the necessary'. This may serve as only a minor illustration, but it is one of an absolutely incalculable number of results, good and bad alike, into which the influence of this man resolves itself. Prosperity in one generation means living in the next."

"Quite possibly, but in this generation it takes a form which is, well, unpleasant. And it is unpleasant, I think, because of our curious democratic assumption that so long as we allow ourselves to feel inferior to nobody, we may feel superior to as many as we choose—an assumption so far removed from any genuine question of superiority or

inferiority that it ripens with dangerous quickness, I fear, into the belief that all men are equal who have the money. It becomes a social necessity to maintain the appearance of prosperity when we have not the reality. It becomes necessary, for instance, to live in one of the chosen streets which are a sort of passport to social standing. It creates a tyranny of circumstance so strong that children, born in the accepted street, instinctively look askance at children born in the debarred street round the corner. And people wonder why some Americans, when they come to Europe, give up living in the fashion they have been accustomed to, frequent places whose like they would not frequent at home, and live in mean streets. The very best sort of people in France practise the most grovelling and open economies and travel in any fashion and live in any place. Yes, and many a reduced

baron and threadbare count have I seen standing up in the steerage of an ocean steamer, graciously accepting oranges and apples tossed down from the upper decks, and lifting their hats in an exquisite spirit of condescension. To them it was a reason neither for pride nor shame to be seen in the steerage—it was merely a fact, part of the machinery of life, and as such to be ignored."

"When a social standard is prosperity (or the appearance of prosperity), it means, I suppose, that prosperity is still a little unfamiliar and not quite normal, that we have not expanded ourselves enough to be quite at home in prosperity. And where we approve of a man for the mere fact that he is busy—without considering the purpose of his activity, we really approve of him for keeping his mind distracted, and for perpetually spurning the present moment. And

all this because we regard activity as a symbol of efficiency, and efficiency as the holy and inviolate proof that the machinery of life is running well. And because we like to be continually reminded of this fact, we show that we do not take the machinery of life for granted—which takes us back to the old wine that burst the new bottles!—and to the Puritan days when it was the absolute necessity for every American to put his hand to the running of this machinery."

"You are running your logic into the ground with a vengeance! There is one odd thing about this 'spurning of the present' we are so fond of, and 'saving up for a perpetually receding future'. We apparently want to distract ourselves from the present by being always busy, and yet at the same time we are for ever occupied with the things of the moment. Our exclusive interests are the immediate interests. Our sensations

are the sensations of the morning newspaper—that hardly outlive the morning newspaper. We do not even allow ourselves the little solace that our transitory state of mind might bring by lingering in the quality of the passing moment, but keep ourselves continually in a state of ineffectual irritation. We take up persons of the moment, authors, sections of the world with enthusiastic impermanence. When Miss Stone is captured by brigands and set free again, her story is on everybody's lips. Our magazines pay her thousands for a single article, our lecture-managers fly to the lucrative opportunity, and engage her to tour the country. Does Miss Stone interest anybody now? — or brigandage? Was it not, after all, the desire to see, to touch, to hear a nine days' wonder? It is the editors and the managers who have learned that the one permanent thing is impermanence, and who reap their harvests by

watching for everything that has 'topical' value."

"Even our slang words are more ephemeral than the slang words of other countries!"

"And then how convulsively we exercise ourselves every now and then in exposing some public evil, or what we conceive to be some public evil! — Peruna, Chicago beef — or the early home of Vice-President Fairbanks. We take them up desperately for a week, under the influence of a few magazines which have made themselves popular by these means, and then we drop them. And if we have been in the habit of using patent medicines or tinned meats, in a month we are all forgetfully using them again. And we may be sure that the makers of these goods, after ostentatiously allowing themselves to be investigated, go back under new names to their illicit practices as soon as the 'dread voice is past'. We encourage this kind of in-

vestigation just as far as it is amusing in print, but we endure any form of evil which does not lend itself to ridicule or sensationalism."

"Just so our conversation is largely morning-paper conversation, the newest developments in politics or the police-courts, the latest happenings of our friends, or perhaps the latest book we have been reading or the latest play we have seen. The subject which occupies the longest column-space in the newspaper occupies the mind of America that day: Mr Rockefeller in the morning paper gives place to Mr Morgan in the evening paper. We seldom discuss the theories and principles that lie behind these things, the tendencies rather than the events of politics, the qualities rather than the anecdotes of books and plays."

"And do you remember the poor old Simple Life?"

"One of the latest editions was an *edition*

de luxe printed on flowered paper and bound in blue silk. The flowered paper and the blue silk live on in America long after the Simple Life has been laughed away into neglected platitude."

"And who beside Mr Roosevelt remembers the day of simplified spelling?"

"Then again we hear perhaps over the telephone some mention of an old friend's misfortune, some case of poverty or infirmity or chronic disease; and although we may have known about the case for years, our sympathy is suddenly aroused, and we allow nothing to stand in the way of that most pressing and immediate need, the need of sending, often at the greatest inconvenience, some books or jellies or flowers round the corner. We are really touched. We are really regretful of all our former thoughtlessness. We have the kindest motives, and we take no end of pains to do the right thing.

But the fact is that all those feelings of sympathy and kindness were suggested by a sudden telephone message, and when we have set aside everything else to do this immediate duty, the sympathy flies out of our heads again as quickly as it came in—until the next telephone message."

"Well, of course it is natural that our sympathy should be aroused in this way," said I, "for certainly we cannot in our many duties and interests keep them all constantly before us. I suppose you mean that we ought to have a kind of interwoven, underlying sub-consciousness of them all which is prepared for these sudden demands and is not shocked and violated when they arise. As it is, of course, a demand of this sort absorbs everything in life for the moment, and calls out a turbulent and excessive riot of emotions. And the result is that we give the matter a degree of thought quite out of proportion to

its deserts, that we express a momentary sympathy far beyond anything normal in the relations between two not particularly intimate friends, that our own self-respect is quite needlessly injured by our mortification, and that, in short, we call out all our reserve, and lavish it upon some poor, dazed creature who only wanted five minutes of moderate attention from week to week."

"Yes," he returned; "and it seems to me that really to understand what it all means one must compare it with quite a different state of mind. Take France, for example. The other day I was glancing through the *Journal des Debats* when I found a full column on the front page devoted to a new anecdote which had come to light about Louis XI. It was not a particularly startling anecdote. The significant thing about it, to my mind, was that a piece of historical news about a man who died some four or five centuries ago should be treated exactly

as any other kind of news, and be printed on the front page of a popular morning paper along with motor accidents and murders and the latest dispatches from Morocco. It would certainly not have been printed there if the everyday reader had not been prepared to accept it in exactly the spirit in which he accepted everything else on the front page, that is to say, as a perfectly legitimate and even an exciting piece of news. It meant that the average middle-class Frenchman, however volatile we may think him, is anything but volatile in the sense that he has not deep-rooted intellectual instincts, and that the history and traditions of his race are not ever present to his mind. He has, in short, a background and a reserve. I remember wondering at the time if any popular American morning paper would dare to devote a full column on its front page to some newly-discovered anecdote about, say, President James Buchanan."

CHAPTER III

Education and other incidents—Background and reserve—Ivy towers—"Education by George"—College men and the "rush"—Household philosophy—A fine country for boys—Ideals and regrets—"New Thought"—Intelligence and instinct again—Ingenuity and self-centred optimism. The oldest of all thought—Politics considered as an incident—Mr Carnegie's reasons—Outside and in.

"'BACKGROUND and reserve', you say — that's just the point: they come from the cultivation of instinct. And you know we've already discussed why Americans are transparent! The oddest way it all works out—this preoccupation with the machinery—is that we regard education, politics, literature, and things of that sort (*sic*) as incidents, incidentals, things considered (beside the very important matter of getting a living) as of distinctly secondary importance,

and not merely as unimportant branches of life but as unimportant *objects*, things you can touch and handle and separate one from another and turn your back upon. These things are not mixed into our lives, they are in some way excrescences. It is not because we are insincere in the enthusiasm for, say, religion or politics or art which we undoubtedly feel, but that they are not, in spite of our enthusiasm, the primary concern with us. They are reserved for Sundays or Election days, or the Saturday afternoons we spend at the museum, or the winter evenings we spend over a good book; they certainly do not flavour our moments as they pass, as if they were born and bred in us and somehow seemed always present though we never happened to see any particular picture or read any particular book. And although we are entirely sincere in our religion and politics and in our desire for some ideal of education, we are sincere in only one at a time; we do not

look at them all from a single unified point of view, merely stressed a little on one side to meet the special requirements of religion, or art, or whatever it happens for the moment to be. I mean that we have not towards them all a constant and unified attitude, to which, as a criterion, we submit them all and in which they all mix together to form a spiritual background.

"We allow ourselves to be absorbed heart and soul in the thing of the moment, and our absorption is not a stress, an emphasis of one side of our nature, but a momentary abandonment of all consciousness of the rest of the claims of life in one claim. We leap from one interest to another, entirely forgetting the first interest in our enthusiasm for the second. We pass from the drawing-room to the office and think it necessary to lay aside our manners. We pass from our holiday to the office and think it necessary to lay aside recreation. We pass from the church to the office and think it

necessary to lay aside our finer distinctions between right and wrong. And there is in all this an illustration, as it seems to me, of our lack of purpose, of fixed ideas, of principles applicable at all times, in short, of a background, a point of view."

"It seems to me too that education, religion, politics, literature, recreation, humour, art—that all these things in America are somehow *splits* from life, things we reach for on the shelf as it were, each when its turn comes. They grow out of life in a sense, but they are cut flowers that hardly stand in the same vase. Take education, for example. You know it is noticed that American children on the whole are more agile thinkers and better informed than European children? And you know, from what one gathers, that undergraduates at Oxford are less mature than, say, undergraduates at Harvard? . . . At Oxford they mature slowly, possibly, but they mature very surely, and their education

never comes to an end. When they leave the university their degree does not represent a harsh breaking-off from one kind of life to begin another, as ours so often does. I know of a certain American student whose first act after taking his degree was to telegraph home, 'Educated, by George!' Of course it was meant as a joke, but wherever there is any humour *in* a thing it always means that there is a certain measure of truth *behind* it. And the truth is that we are pretty apt to regard education as education and life as life, and that somehow or other these things appear to be distinctly independent of each other."

"Well, we have both known at college undergraduates—and hundreds of them—who were sincerely interested in history or political economy or literature, and who after graduation have plunged into business and have hardly given a serious thought since to any matter outside the immediate matter of making a living.

And plenty of them have had leisure enough too—they have totally forgotten even the inclination. They have perhaps gained a certain superior grasp of affairs, but they have gained no lasting sense of the subordination of buying and selling to great ideas. They are at twenty-two or twenty-three larger-minded men than they will ever be in later years. Their minds do not slowly ripen into fixed ideas. Their education does not, as a rule, build the foundation of a solid and cumulative philosophy of life, which grows deeper and mellower as the years go on."

"Yes; college men sometimes feel that they are forced into the 'rush', but my experience has been that, on the whole, they go in deliberately. Perhaps in most cases they feel that the first step upward is to support themselves. If they have any independence of mind their independence is expected to take that form. But very often it is their *dependence* which takes

that form, their dependence on the convention they have been brought up to. I don't think that a man with imagination always serves his family best by harnessing himself into a pre-ordained point of view, even if his family imagine for the moment that they want him to. And it's natural enough for families to feel as they do. All fathers and mothers like to feel that their children are really unusual, but in their hearts they know that only one child in ten thousand *is*, and from close contact they lose all power of judging whether or not their child is that one. So they instinctively act on the assumption that he is like the rest, knowing that if he is going to fall into mediocrity, he will fall more gracefully if he never attempts to rise out of it. For his own good they train him to the idea of mediocrity, or, at best, of a very safe, pedestrian career. . . . The family council takes no stock in ambitions and enthusiasms—how can it? Not one of us takes any stock in

other people's ambitions. Ambition is one of those impossible things that every man must prove his right to in the face of experience. And every man who knows anything about himself knows more than his family. The better the family the more individuals it contains who make war on the common judgment of all the rest. They are not worth pulling together if they do not, one and all, obstinately, steadfastly pull apart, each in his own fixed idea. It is almost the worst thing that can happen to a man whose opportunity depends upon his imagination to be harried and driven by small realities before his imagination is mature enough to command those realities. Poverty does not turn a man's mind to his work, it distracts his mind from his work. Little necessities grind the edge away from big ideas—assuming that a man *has* ideas. I am sure that sad mistakes are made in the cause of 'supporting oneself' too soon. So far as they say that it strengthens a man's

"And I think," said Græling, "that religion fares the same way. The religious spirit in general with us seems to be an emanation rather of intelligence than of instinct—that is to say, it has no connection with our ancestors or any roots in anything. For example, only consider the appalling spread in the last few years of so-called 'new thought' in its countless forms. As religions, they appear to have the added value of appealing to the mind as well as the heart. But why do their followers drift unsatisfied from one form into another? It is because these teachings do not really appeal to the heart at all, which is constant, but solely to the mind, which is inquisitive and insatiably variable. They appeal in fact to the mind only, and they achieve a momentary optimism and a renewed confidence in life which are the reactions of certain mental processes that seem to justify our faith because, quite naturally, they work out correctly.

They appeal once more to our American appetite for the ingenious, for the rational for its own sake, and they are concerned more with their own mechanism as an end in itself than with their products in human conduct."

"And so, naturally enough, the followers of 'new thought' are self-seekers who lay no store by charity, pity, or renunciation—the great products of real religion. It is all for their own personal health or luck or peace of mind or success, and the optimism that they discover is seldom compatible with humility of heart. It is, on the contrary, an aggressive, self-centred optimism, which makes one feel how much better off one is than the rest of mankind. It is apparently a more complex system than that of devotional religion: but it is intellectually complex and not emotionally complex. And thus when one has got to the bottom of it, one catalogues it, and lays it away, as a mental problem solved, a puzzle

that one has unravelled—among the stored experiences of the mind, and turns to something new. It is in the last analysis transparent because it is nothing more or less than psychology, and as such capable, at least mentally, of being analysed. Devotional religion is theoretically simple enough, but in practice one can no more see the bottom of it than one can see the bottom of the human heart. It cannot be worn out and seen through and laid aside as a piece of scientific experience is bound to be. . . . Not that religion is to suffer when psychology comes to analyse the heart itself: but it appears to me that 'new thought' is in reality the oldest of all thought—Asiatic thought, and that there has developed through the centuries a distinction between the human and the speculative which this revival ignores. It will be admirable when psychology is able to determine what the heart is—we have discussed this

before: but psychology cannot deny that the heart is different from the mind though it be only the dead minds of all our ancestors glimmering collectedly in us. Or, if you like, reduce all religion to natural laws, and you still have the greatest principle of all over and above—renunciation, which cannot be an echo of them. Whatever philosophy may be and whatever religion may be, it seems to me that all philosophies are, at least potentially, embryo religions—theoretical bases for religions, and that religion is merely thought made personal, transmuted into aspiration, carried out of symbols and syllogisms and turned into conduct and practice. So far as our discussion is concerned, it is in this attitude toward religion—not as a rational attitude, for religion like everything else deserves to be treated rationally, but as a method of being rational for the mere amusement of being rational, as an end instead of

an explanation—that religion becomes a mere incident (or rather a series of incidents!) in our intellectual life."

"Certainly," said I, "it seems as if religion too were an incident, for these countless ism's are far more expressive of American life than any of the older churches, because they are native products. It is for just these reasons that our religion is not a commentary on our education, or *vice versâ*, and that neither is a commentary on our attitude toward the State. They are all absolutely separate. And being incidents they do not mix together to form a background from which we look out upon life in general."

"Politics—our attitude towards the State: yes, it's the same with politics. Just as the individual contains warring and clashing elements which develop separately and without harmony one with another, so the State is made up of warring and clashing individuals

who put their own development before any considerations of the community. Each man works entirely for his own family and his own interests, with no horizon wider than his own immediate affairs. He does not conceive of his relation to a million other men around him.* He is interested in politics only because politics affect the value of his stocks. He makes every possible excuse to avoid serving on a jury. He is as carelessly irresponsible in the matter of national economy as he is morbidly responsible in the matter of personal economy. And in ignoring that part of his own well-being which depends on the community, he loses to just that degree the advantages which the community creates. He simply doesn't care for any of these things."

* When Mr Bernard Shaw sums up America and the Americans in one final word, "Idiocy," does he mean the word in its exact or in its apparent sense? The Greek meaning of the word "idiot" is *a person self-occupied, of no direct use to the State:* and in this sense no summing-up could be more entirely just.

"There is a terribly apt little anecdote of the Tweed Days that comes to my mind," I interposed. "I think it was in 1871 that the *New York Times* published a list of cheques amounting to six million and odd dollars which had been paid out for repairs in armouries and county offices alone in the first eight or nine months of Oakey Hall's mayorship. Well, as the mayor made no reply, some patriotic citizen called a meeting of the voters of two wards of the city. They passed an elaborate series of resolutions demanding either an immediate explanation or the resignation of the mayor. These resolutions were signed by a large number of influential citizens who had presumably been present at the meeting, and were sent to the mayor. In two or three days each signer received a printed letter in reply. Mr Hall did not consider their communication the sort that a gentleman could receive.

Mr Hall had been reliably informed that not one-tenth of the signers had been present at the meeting, that many of the signers were not residents in the wards represented in the resolutions, and that, since the chairman of the meeting had forgotten to put the negative, the resolutions themselves had not been properly passed. Mr Hall begged to add something of this kind: 'It is not for any of you to ask me to resign under any circumstances'. He was quite right. At this critical moment not one-tenth of the influential citizens had taken the trouble to be present at the meeting, nor had even taken the trouble to read through the resolutions that were brought to them to sign or they would have seen that their signatures were valueless as representing wards in which they were not residents. Furthermore, the secretary had not taken the trouble to pass the resolutions correctly. So the matter was

dropped and Mr Hall continued to amuse himself unmolested. . . . I should call that an example of politics considered as an incident."

"To justify this preoccupation with the tangible and the immediate, and to justify money-getting in general, we speak of the fortunes given away in charity, in founding hospitals and building libraries, as if these things were in themselves the justification for great fortunes. Mr Carnegie gives three reasons why it is every man's duty to make a fortune if he can: (1) To bequeath it to his wife and children—which is a criminally selfish reason; (2) To bequeath it to charity; and (3) To spend it well while he is alive. The last two reasons are the only ones worthy to be considered, since money absorbed from the community is bound in justice sooner or later to go back to it. In Mr Carnegie's view the millionaire has proved his right to be a sort of trustee of the

people's money by the mere fact of his having in one way or another got the money away from them. Surely it is a little difficult to imagine, considering Mr Rockefeller, that the power of making money and the power of best serving the people are identical."

"It seems to me that we need not so greatly the charitable institutions to repair the wrong from the outside as the cultivation of some sort of inner national life which will more and more enable us to dispense with charitable institutions. It is our hurried preoccupation with tangible, personal affairs which blinds us to theoretical principles and incapacitates us for any great idea, any great cause."

CHAPTER IV

The literature of apoplexy—"The Call of the Lungs"—Grammar school fallacies—The unhelpful Puritans—Sudden light—A strange doctor—Our first humorist—Extraction and distraction—Two kinds of morality—"Pop goes the weasel"—Q. K. Philander Doesticks & Co.—Mr Dooley's chances—Lowell on cataracts—"Any old thing"—A dead man—Artemus Ward's reputation—The quality of American fame—Normal fame and Barnum—The main chance—Humanity and Greek accents—"Labour talk"—Orchids.

"YOU know," I said, "I think one can explain in the same way the most conspicuous school of literature we are suffering just now in America. You know, for example, that one of our new popular magazines describes itself in its prospectus as 'leaping with red blood' and incidentally 'alive with all the big, interesting things in the universe'."

"Yes, I *do* know," said Græling. "It is what I should call the Literature of Apoplexy. The chief aim of these writers, apparently, is to avoid using the same superlative twice. It reminds me of a friend of mine who told me once that, in his opinion, there were three great English poets, Shakespeare, Kipling, and Milton. At the time it seemed to me something of a compromise to put Shakespeare first, for Shakespeare and Milton were included in deference to authority while Kipling came from the heart. I understand that frame of mind, I think. It is the triumphant cult of the manly and the vital — and there are many poems of Kipling with such a swing to them that to do justice to the metre it is necessary to slap one's knee at the end of each line."

"Well," I said, "here is a little sample of it —a publisher's view of one of his publica-

tions." I drew a little paper from my pocket and read aloud—

"*The Call of the Lungs.**

"(Jack Paris., pp. 318. $1·50.)

"We have little hesitation in saying that this is a book to be read. Even more than this world-famous story-teller's other latest work, trenchant as that is with humour and understanding, *The Call of the Lungs* will be the most talked-of book of the season. *John Sprod* is a man—a strong, tender, hot-veined man. He is shooting Indians in Idaho when he meets *Lady Gwendolen Cholmondeley-Colquhoun*, who, wholesome and sweet and human woman that she is, weary of the inanities of effete society, longs for a vital feeling of the big forces that are animating the boundless West. She has disguised herself as an old Indian war-chief, and single-handed has held at bay, through the interminable

* Reprinted from *Punch*.

Arctic-like winter, seven regiments of United States troops. When spring breaks she has once more the old tired feeling of her race. Seated among her piles of scalps she has just finished her fifth Manhattan cocktail one evening when she hears a voice calling to her from across the boundless prairie hundreds of miles away. It is strong and tender and vital. It is *John's* voice and it calls 'Gwen'. It is a clash of races, and her deep, vivid, passionate nature responds. In a moment he looms beside her, a real living thing, his big, soft, pulsing arms about her, in all the thrill of rich, tender fiction. The book is big: it burns hot with harsh but hopeful truth. The title is not new, suggesting, as it does, *The Call of the Wild*, *The Call of the Blood*, etc.; but we do not hesitate to assert that *The Call of the Lungs* will make, if possible, an even bigger sensation than these."

"I know the style," said Græling, "and

it has some connection with our imperial theories. It has been growing more and more apoplectic ever since the Spanish war. But how does any one individual come to write in this fashion? And how does any one individual come to relish the reading of it? Those questions have often puzzled me."

"Well," I replied, "I believe you can find the reason — or one reason — in our grammar schools. With the intent of teaching literature—not patriotism in this case, but literature—the powers of the grammar schools deliberately abet the New England provinciality of nine-tenths of the teachers by offering the most provincial parts of Bryant and Whittier. I should not advocate offering Shelley and Wordsworth instead *because* they are not American, but I think that on the whole the study of literature has much deeper results than either patriotism or the lack of it. I should advocate the offering

of Shelley and Wordsworth because they are just as easy to grasp as Bryant and Whittier, and are, at the same time, more universal, and better able to prepare one for the true and great forces of life. It is perfectly true that a boy who has read nothing will *feel* something in Wordsworth that he misses in Bryant, and that three or four years in an American grammar school destroys that sense. It is the instinctive perception in all unspoilt minds of the pure work of beauty : which the peasant folk of every land have given witness of in their country songs before they were spoilt by the cheap sophistication, with all its jangling sentimentality, of the city street-songs. And it is what the peasant folk had before the factories gave them tawdry, betinselled crockery and showy, unsubstantial furniture so cheaply, that they could not afford to give their labour any more to making for themselves the fine, sturdy, simple platters and settees that

we search out greedily, and make our proudest ornaments.

"That there is something of the factory-made about Bryant is a little beside the point. Bryant and, to a much greater degree, Whittier, express very fervently the fine, intensive moral culture of New England—a culture which produced a noble chivalry to which provinciality was almost a condition. And this old idea is kept alive through the country largely by the general class of our school-teachers, most of whom are either New England born or trained, and all of whom drift back at least in spirit from year to year to the head waters of American culture, taking home with them the old traditions and ideals, and thus keeping New England alive in distant parts. Nothing in itself could be more beautiful than this ancestral sentiment carried into new and rougher regions, but no sentiment could on the whole be more fruitless

or even dangerous. For the Americans, alone among all the races of the world, cannot seek for any interpretation of life in their own remote antiquity, simply because the childhood of America is the childhood of another country. We have no myths, there is nothing childlike in our past, and when we look to our ancestors to help us we find them almost as grown-up and self-conscious as we ourselves. We seek in them virtues to be copied, and we find their virtues negative, necessarily negative; noble for them because adapted to their situation, but obsolete and ill-adapted for ours. We can draw less virtue out of an ancestry than any other race, because the founders of America and their descendants of to-day, as I think you have suggested, are alike full-grown men facing problems utterly different."

"You're bringing up the theory we've discussed before?" Græling asked. "Older

races 'draw virtue out of their ancestry' because their founders were children, and because the comments of children are always apt?"

"Exactly. But this is hardly a theory of sentiment. It is true in a very practical way. For although we have developed out of the Puritan type, our problems have not developed out of the Puritan problems. The negro question, the immigration question, the problem of imperialism, and greatest of all, the problem of financial prosperity have been thrust upon us by circumstances which hardly existed in embryo among the Pilgrims. They are problems which belong to an advanced state of cosmopolitan civilization, and to meet them the modern American requires a preparation in kind. And on the whole, the more vividly we preserve the Puritan idea—with all its virtues adapted to a special and temporary situation, the less prepared we are to meet

these problems. For, as we have said, the virtues of the Pilgrims were not those racial virtues which are always relevant because they have grown out of an antiquity which held in embryo all the later problems of the race. They were the virtues, negative and narrow, of a small colony."

"But just how does this explain our 'Literature of Apoplexy'?"

"Well, literature is an index of public sentiment. The poems of Bryant and Whittier, formerly adequate for the education of New England, are no longer adequate for the education of America. They do not train the perception to large and universal truths. They do not widen the mind. They do not prepare the mind for the general questions of modern, cosmopolitan life. You know what Whittier said of himself—

'Not mine the seer-like power to show
The secrets of the heart and mind.'

His message in all its beauty is the message of a section, a province. It is no more the poetry of the normal American of to-day than the poetry of George Herbert. It is minor poetry of a sectarian kind. And yet it is a symbol of our school-training.

"But now see how it works out. I emphasize this so much because I believe that if a boy is brought up on second-rate literature—second-rate as literature, no matter how high its moral tone may be—when he grows up he will have gained no taste for first-rate literature. It might still be all very well if he had gained a taste even for second-rate literature. But the second-rate has not won his heart, and when he is free of school, and no longer under compulsion, he throws aside literature altogether, and if he reads at all he reads trashy novels and wretched magazines, with the result that his whole intellectual perception, even, I think,

his moral fineness, is blunted. It is only possible to train a love of literature from the very best, and for this reason, only well-trained minds can absorb the second-rate with impunity. We Americans are omnivorous readers, but our taste is indiscriminating precisely because our minds have been vitiated by literature, morally harmless enough but intellectually destructive. . . . Familiar since childhood with a literature intellectually primitive and inadequate to a mature civilization, the American suddenly becomes conscious of the great forces of modern life. He is unaccustomed to the literature of great forces. He is almost unaware that great forces have existed elsewhere or before. He has been carefully trained as a provincial and is thrown into cosmopolitan life. He learns to spell Destiny, Wealth, Power, as if they were new experiences, not to him only but to the whole world. He only knows that he feels and feels tumultu-

ously. Is it remarkable that he should be carried away by this intemperate talk about tenderness and strength, bigness and destiny? Is it remarkable that our popular magazines should be conceived in 'red blood'?"

"But surely," said Græling, "this apoplectic literature more nearly expresses what is really stirring in America than, for example, those purveyors of an irrelevant 'Sweetness and Light' we still find in the magazines and on little cardboard mottoes hung up on gas-fixtures. They are merely the leavings of a past generation in England mixed with a good deal of lukewarm water and simmering on for ever."

"Oh, yes, it is simply an attempt to express the great forces of which we have suddenly become conscious, but for which we have not been prepared."

"Well, before long, I think, a strange doctor is coming to feel the pulse of our system, and insert his knife somewhere to lower our tempera-

ture. That strange doctor is going to be the first great American satirist. He will laugh so loud at things American that the whole continent shall hear him. And when he has got us all into his good-humoured, fatherly confidence he will show us what a big over-grown rowdy we have been."

"Oh," I said, "I am perfectly sure that we are on the edge of an age of satire. But I think that the great satirist will show us that we are nearly as big and strong as we supposed ourselves. He will simply teach us to be quiet about it."

"I suppose then that he will be the first American humorist?" inquired Græling.

"Are you sure you are not asking that for effect? We are supposed, you know, to be a nation of humorists already."

"But our humorists don't carry on the great tradition of humour. As a general thing they don't depend upon being true to life, upon

creating characters that strike us because they are so absurdly true, as upon whiling away the time with puns and conundrums and all sorts of extravagant conceits (like 'Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven') which strike us because they are so absurdly *untrue*. The great tradition of humour is to play through life interpreting our days to us. In our humour we seek not life itself but a refuge from life—not something that will make our days more fresh and real to us, but something that will transport us somewhere, anywhere to make us happily forget our days. Not only does the present moment seem less desirable than any other moment, but we spurn any kind of thought that will make the present desirable. So our humour is not the humour of *ex*traction from life but of *dis*traction from life."

"Well, certainly the humour of Rabelais, Cervantes, Addison and Thackeray is largely a comment on principles and traits of unchanging human nature. Very often it serves to satirize

a temporary over-emphasis of certain human tendencies, or to speak the special humours of a single race. But in the main it seeks to picture man as in all times and places he ought to be, by leading before a kind of high court of genial justice men and measures that stand for what man ought not to be. It cuts away all variations from the normal type."

"And the humorist ought to make people not only see but love what is true and normal."

"Yes, he ought to have a perception of the truth not in the mind merely, with its logical realization that what is normal is also useful to the general good, but that perception of the heart also which is the final blossom of a long evolution of dead minds sadly familiar in their day with the weakness and error that lead men aside. It will convince people not merely because it is just, but because its justice is tempered with an understanding of the ways and the delights of injustice."

"But our humour is a kind which has neither past nor future, but only the moment of its flash, a humour not sprung from genial soil nor reflecting the tears and smiles of dead generations, not the humour of sentiment or pathos—it is a humour of light rather than heat, a humour of the pure intelligence, so harsh that if it expressed an enduring mood it would be cynical. It is often what we call dry humour—the kind which rustles through a man's lips without being tinged with blood from his heart, flaring up electrically for its occasion and subsiding grey and chilly, scintillating out of a sordid background, a humour of shifts and grit, common sense and bitter pluck. It implies nothing, it indicates no philosophy of life. It fits the need of the moment and passes with the moment."

"But of course we have had a Humour, as you say, of Extraction as well as a Humour of Distraction: I suppose it was an academic

humour brought from Europe. Washington Irving is to the old traditional humour of England very much what George Washington is to the old traditional English gentleman. In both characters one feels the derivation from a European culture. There is a curious difference from that which we recognize as indigenous with us. Just so with Dr Holmes and George William Curtis, in a sense. Humour with them, as with Addison, is a kind of morality."

"There is the point, I think. The Puritans had another kind of morality. They distinguished harshly between right and wrong, and fixed themselves to follow the right and to impose their standard without compromise or explanation upon all who joined them. They were able to ignore evil because they had trained themselves inexorably away from any leavings that might have lingered in them from their former life in an old civilization,

where men could not so easily separate darkness from light. To do sin even the grace of understanding it seemed to them a sort of compromise with the devil: sympathy with weakness was a kind of temporizing with weakness. They neither asked nor welcomed recruits. They believed their view to be right, and they were not careful of other views. They were not propagandists, and they preferred to take all the consequences of their own sectarianism. Such men outside as were so close to virtue that the merest smile of friendship would have gathered their perplexed hearts into the kingdom of the just —such were still outside. Drunkards and murderers alike lingered only a little while under the cloud of the general doom—'Sinners in the hands of an angry God'!

"To this morality of damnation and reward, accurately suited to the life of a parcel of noble sectarians labouring at a special moment in the

special circumstances of an untempered province, what message could the greater morality of humour bring, suited, as it is, to the unravelling of perplexities which spring from long-established civilizations—a morality which turns men aside to universal ideals from the bigoted excess which is needful to the establishing of any one civilization? Pioneers have always sacrificed the irrelevant greater to the immediate less. They cannot allow themselves the virtue of breadth. The men who come after can be serious. The pioneers have to be earnest, and to be earnest is to be serious without a sense of humour. . . . But every man will have his humour. And if humour is discredited as a high court of morality, it will have its fling at the windows of any other court. If we refuse it the title of Reverence, it will shock us by being irreverent. If we begrudge it the right to stand sponsor at baptism with Sir Roger de Coverley, it will

play profane hide-and-seek with Petroleum V. Nasby."

"Do you remember these lines?—

'Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep:
If I should die before I wake—
Pop goes the weasel!'"

"But, you know, in one sense our humour is never irreverent—because it is never actually hostile to religion. Only that as the reaction from that rational Puritan morality in which moral law was a cold and righteous necessity to which symbol and sentiment seemed irrelevant, it has become a thing quite apart from religion and morality, and comments in a spirit of untempered independence upon them as upon everything else in life. It was crowded out from the fertile fields and took root among the rocks and brambles to reach a wild, uncultivated, ephemeral growth all its own. But any kind of imaginative comment on religion that is not essentially reverent is

necessarily irreverent. Only unemotional scientific writing can keep a strictly neutral tone. The emotions force one to take a position, and all who are not *for* are *against*."

"Yes, our humour has undoubtedly drifted apart and ceased to be an expression of life. And our humorists are homeless, nameless vagrants."

"Nameless! Yes, that is a very significant thing about them all. They never write under their own names. Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, Mr Dooley—they have never spoken through their own lips. Each creates a character to embody his philosophy as if it were something apart from himself. There is something very odd about this, for these few names represent one of our traditions. I should say that nearly a hundred American wits have spoken through masks of this sort, concealing their own grim, laborious, and often

decidedly unhumorous personalities behind them. Think of Mozis Addums and Q. K. Philander Doesticks and Orpheus C. Ker and Petroleum V. Nasby and Bill Arp. All those and dozens more must have felt either that there lay in their humour something unworthy of their own respectable names—David Ross Locke, Seba Smith, and the like—or else that such ordinary names were not worthy of their humour. But I think that humour ought not to be a respecter of names."

"Their humour is in some way apart from themselves. And then again, they are not attached to any corner of the soil. They have no homes. They apparently have no ancestors. They wander about from New York to Ohio and the Mississippi, jesting about anything that comes to their notice as if they had dropped from the skies. They have no connection with anything."

"And then again, they never comment on

life in general, but only on the event of the moment that comes and goes—and when the event passes the humour passes with it. You would be surprised to open an early Dooley book and find how many of the essays are totally unintelligible, because in their day they depended upon the vivid presence of certain events which are quite forgotten. An almost countless number of war-time humorists were utterly forgotten thirty years ago for just this reason. . . . It reminds me of the days when I read the comedies of Plautus and Terence—whenever I stumbled on a particularly difficult problem in syntax I knew it was a joke. But there is a difference, for Terence's jokes did not depend for their meaning on any local events of the year 160 B.C.—or whenever it was, but were perfectly intelligible as long as Latin was a familiar spoken language. Our humorists hinge their wit to short moments of time, never commenting on life,

or even upon American life, as it is permanently. To be read broadcast across one decade they sacrifice their chance of being read lengthwise down many decades. Josh Billings and Petroleum V. Nasby will live not as humorists but as minor characters of American fiction. Whatever truth there is in them is the truth of a single decade. They reflect no permanent American traits."

"On the whole, I think we have no very clear standard of humour and imagination. Lowell, for instance, was really humorous a hundred times, but he wrote a great many things which make one doubt for the moment that he had a sense of humour at all. In one of his critical essays he speaks of Milton as 'the only man who ever got much poetry out of a cataract—and that was a cataract in his eye', which is obviously meant for humour. On the other hand, I remember reading in one of E. P. Whipple's essays on poetry that 'Mrs Osgood

did not appear to feel the fetters of rhyme: she *danced* in them'. If that is meant for a witty compliment, something is wrong somewhere. And Lowell speaks of a negro, 'so black that charcoal made a chalk mark upon him'—a typical example of all native American humour. It strikes us not because it is a true comment on life—an extraction from life, but because it is entirely untrue and preposterous—a distraction from life. Mark Twain is the apotheosis of all these traditions."

"Well, to go back to our first theory, our humour is largely the result of our taking nothing for granted. To uneducated people and children everything is incongruous. Negroes grin and chuckle from daylight till dark. And do you remember where Hazlitt speaks of three chimney-sweepers meeting three Chinese in Lincoln's Inn Fields who laughed at one another till they were ready to drop down? The more civilized we become, the more we

learn to take for granted, until the superficial things no longer amuse us at all, and we find true incongruities only in the deep, underlying facts of life. We find no humour in jokes that are merely jugglings with words, double meanings, conundrums, and that spurious kind of Artemus-Ward wit which depends upon bad grammar and bad spelling, unless they express some real incongruity in the human situation. . . . Our idea of humour is of something contrary to life, not sprung from life."

"Very often, I fancy, our humorists are facetious, because there was no breadth of outlook in their ancestors to blossom into humour. It is in the fact that their humour is never the inevitable expression of a certain situation that you find the origin of our phrase, 'any old thing'. Artemus Ward chose for his lecture the title 'The Babes in the Wood' in preference to 'My Seven Grandmothers'—or indeed anything else in the universe. 'Any

old title', you see, would have done as well as any other, and the question became not how to find the most fitting title but one that sounded the best. If the idea had sprung out of a background it would have required an inevitable title: being merely a bundle of jokes, *à propos* of nothing in particular, any title with an attractive sound would serve."

"By the way, I have had a couple of curious experiences in regard to these American humorists. I once tried to write a book called 'The American Humorists', modelled on the plan of Thackeray's 'English Humorists'. That is, I tried to recreate the personalities of Josh Billings, Artemus Ward, Petroleum V. Nasby, Hosea Biglow, and a few others, to make them breathe and live and walk. Do you know they simply *wouldn't* live: the real men who stood behind them—Henry Shaw, Charles Browne, and James Russell Lowell—were such utterly different personalities, where

they were personalities at all. The lives of Steele and Goldsmith and Fielding are somehow humorous lives, but there is nothing humorous about the life of the man who created Josh Billings. I mean there are no humorous situations in his life and no evidence of his having actually, so to speak, lived humorously. The character of 'Josh Billings' seemed to have sprung out of his head instead of his heart. It is all intelligence without instinct. There is no pathos, no charm, no tragedy anywhere. He is simply a dead man. And they are all as dead as doornails.

"The other experience seems to me to mean even more. You have probably noticed that in America we have pretty generally forgotten Artemus Ward, except merely that there *was* such a man and that he was a funny man: while in England I find that he is read and remembered vividly. Forty years ago there was not a more famous character in all America,

—his local sayings and topical hits were quoted everywhere; he was the Mr Dooley of the 'sixties. In England where his topical references were never understood, his reputation has never waned."

"Fame is a strange thing with us. A man who has the good luck not to take America by storm has some chance of living a few years after he dies. Is it because our famous men generally spring out of nothing, because their fame has no connection with reality, and because they are really exotics? In other countries a man seems to win fame precisely because his talent is the blossom of the very deepest roots of national life; there is a certain perfectly definite range of human interests which lead to it—war, art, politics, etc. Fame with us is a sort of gaudy melon-flower. . . . There is no country which has produced enormously famous men so utterly distinct from the causes that normally lead to fame.

" It seems that fame with us may crown any antic, any extreme that catches our imagination. . . . Brigham Young fills a theatre with his wives and children, occupying the pit meanwhile with his own slouch hat and long cigar; Rockefeller creates out of nothing a fabulous fortune; Mark Twain investigates a comic heaven; Barnum turns the whole universe into a museum of freaks. Whether or not we imagine that we discriminate between the quality of different kinds of fame, these names are immortal, and these men in their several ways have achieved reputations which have remained vivid in the popular mind so long that they will be associated with America while the race exists. Barnum is an absolutely colossal figure, one of the few men who vividly illustrate to foreigners the typical traits of American character. His career, his ingenuity, his audacity of insight and humour, his immortality would have been impossible in any other country, and at first

glance one would say that such a man sprang out of nothing and fulfilled no deep national need."

"But amusement is a very real need. Men like Garrick and Booth deserve their fame."

"There is a distinction. Garrick and Booth won legitimate fame through their personalities. They were men of great hearts, great instincts. Barnum was a shrewd casuist, like Brigham Young and Mr Rockefeller. They are able to calculate their returns; their imagination is the projection of intelligence rather than instinct. They are all powers behind thrones. Barnum's fame is neither the result of his personality nor of any great traits inherent in his nature: his work was something outside of himself, a sheer intellectual *tour de force*. If he recognised that his scheme filled a popular need, it was not because he instinctively felt the need and his own destiny to satisfy it—for after all a great man of any kind, whether he knows it or not,

is normally a *deus ex machinâ* to some kind of national situation: it was because he saw the need intellectually and his own chance of turning it to his own advantage. He exploited his own Americanism. He studied the American character, he developed his ingenuity and his audacity, his instincts of 'any old thing' and 'just about as good' until, well, he was able to take and hold the country by storm for half a century. And he pocketed the profits."

"And by that you mean to suggest?"

"In the first place, that these three men sprang out of absolutely nothing: that their fame in each case does not represent the fulfilling of a national need which had developed force in their ancestors and burst forth in them: that, therefore, in each case fame was the result of an indomitable pursuit of the main chance: that every one of them understood the policy of honesty. The first cause, the first impetus of all their careers was a thirst for the main chance,

inevitably: they were determined to raise themselves out of nothing into something. That is why fame with us, more than with any other people, is usually the result of a *tour de force*, for a large proportion of our famous men have raised themselves out of nothing. In our poorest classes, unlike those of Europe, there is a sense of moral possibility which produces the will to rise. But in our democratic feelings, and particularly in our desire to be more democratic than we really are, we forget that a man who springs out of nothing has, after all, his limitations, and in the average will never quite catch up. We ought to be neither harsh nor sentimental in these matters. A man who starts at bed-rock and builds up a position is pretty apt, unfortunately, to find that his position is not very secure because it has no foundation *beneath* the rock. And if he starts with nothing but his wits he may build up a reputation colossal for the moment but really superficial and

one that will sooner or later collapse, unless he can hold it up by sheer will-power until it actually becomes a part of the popular imagination. Reputation must grow up out of racial instincts if it is to live, normally. And we are very silly sometimes and spoil men who really have no racial instincts and no true right to fame, entirely because they have raised themselves out of nothing."

"There is a passage in Thoreau about John Brown which, in a way, illustrates what you mean, although John Brown had racial instincts indeed. Let me see if I can recollect it: 'He did not go to the college called Harvard, but to the great university of the West, where he sedulously pursued the study of liberty; and having taken many degrees, he finally commenced the public practice of Humanity in Kansas. Such were *his humanities* and not any study of grammar. He would have left a Greek accent slanting the wrong way and

righted up a fallen man'. I knew there was something off-colour about the tone of this, but something very difficult to analyze. I quoted it to an English friend of mine. 'Labour talk', he said. You see it implies that any man who *would* have righted up a Greek accent would necessarily have left a fallen man in the gutter."

"Yes, that's it. . . . I was thinking about the quality of this kind of fame. Talent which is developed entirely by will is bound to be a kind of exotic, having no connection with race or any reality. It is as likely as not to go off on tangents, developing into the most colossal absurdities, so colossal that as with Barnum and Brigham Young we have to take them seriously. . . . If these men are 'cut flowers', they are orchids with a vengeance!"

CHAPTER V

Americans abroad—Whistler's butterfly—Sargent on ostrich plumes—The *reductio ad absurdum*—Racial necessities—Too much comparison—"Fleet Street"—Asphodels in reality—"Yawp"—Originality and tradition—Shaw and the non-assertive—Constructive forces—Denver and Damascus.

"THE question is, why are *we* abroad—we, I mean, so far as we represent a considerable number? To use the dialect we have taken up, are we not cultivating our distraction from American life rather than our extraction from it?"

"There are plenty of reasons for an artist," returned Græling. "For instance, that in Europe he finds the premisses of an artistic life really taken for granted, that he is not expected to appear more prosperous or practical or conventional than he is, that he finds a civilization

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at the same time accustomed to his ways and stimulating to his work, not to mention picture galleries, the high standard by which one is judged, the sympathy and co-operation one meets with at every turn, and the absence both of that active hostility and that excessive enthusiasm toward art which are so equally distressing."

"But it seems to me that an artist can produce great and lasting work only out of the materials which exist in him by instinct and which constitute racial fibre, the accretion of countless generations of ancestors, trained to one deep, local, indigenous attitude toward life. A man is more the product of his race than of his art, for a man may supremely express his race without being an artist, while he cannot be a supreme artist without expressing his race. If it were not so the Greek sculptors could as easily have made their works in Sicily, or the Venetian painters theirs in

Rome. But when the Venetians went to Rome they took Venice with them. I know of no considerable artist whose work does not vividly represent some trait of the race it sprang from."

"Whistler?"

"Not even Whistler. One hardly dares to look for traits of background in Whistler. His contempt and defiance of race only assert the race he defies. If there had been no consciousness of race there would have been no passionate denial of race. A strange, vain, fanatical creature of No-man's-land, he seems to me the logical outcome and the extreme type toward which all American artists who live abroad inevitably tend. He fashions into works of art the splinters of a derelict fancy because he cannot ripen the more wholesome humanity of his imagination. He is one of the great vagabonds who express everything and nothing, a cut flower in a brilliant vase.

That symbol, at once wistful, pathetic, and defiant, with which Whistler signed his pictures —the butterfly—seems to me the cry of the artist cut off, in the face of his possibilities of sane and supreme self-expression, from his own country.

"And it seems to me that Sargent is a lesser man because he has not that spiritual conflict. His roots have not been torn away—because he has no roots. He is a miraculous technician, without soul, without philosophy. There is no relation between his portraits but the relation of a common craftsmanship. They do not reveal the evolution of an artist's soul, they are merely a series of incidents that have passed before an artist's eyes. They do not reveal the evolution of the soul of the subject, but only the spiritual mood in which for the moment he chances to be. And that spiritual mood is often a vivid consciousness on the sitter's part that Mr

Sargent is painting his portrait. They are studies of costume, of gesture, or, at most, of physiognomy—the apotheosis of an ostrich-plume, a symphony in white satin. The sitter himself does not make these accessories inevitable—they are not characteristics of the dominant soul: the sitter is merely part of the scheme, and the unity of the picture is not the unity of a personality but of a decorative idea.

"Sargent reveals his race in the very fact that only America could produce so brilliant an artist so totally without tradition or philosophy or background. And it seems to me that for the same reason those gorgeous panoramas of Abbey's suggest nothing more than they tell, have no connotations and are entirely without reserve. Any portrait by Velasquez gives evidence of three things, the very soul and spiritual average of the sitter, a distinct stage in the evolution of the soul of

the artist, and the racial soul of Spain. I don't mean that these three American painters are equally great, but they are all brilliant, and they all vividly illustrate the effects of ignoring racial tradition."

"But how in the world is an artist to cultivate racial tradition when, as you and I have been trying to show, America has no tradition? You know what American art would have lost if American artists had stayed at home. The American school at the present moment is recognized as one of the most brilliant in the world—there is no question about that. But the American school has been trained abroad."

"And what one trait do you find that these American artists all have in common? Precisely that not one of them could be mistaken essentially for a Frenchman or an Englishman or a Spaniard. Their technique may be the technique of any of these foreign schools, but

where anything lies behind the technique we know that it must be the American spirit, because we can see that it is not the French spirit or the English spirit. By a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* we know them to be American because we can prove them to be nothing else. Aside from that common point, they vary in technique as Fra Angelico varies from Degas."

"But if it is impossible to train oneself in an American tradition—which doesn't exist, is it not something to achieve a brilliant technique?"

"It's like cultivating a brilliant complexion without cultivating health. We've been discussing the results of just that process in the parallel cases of American religion and politics and literature and humour, and although the results are widely different, naturally enough, in all these cases, they represent much the same principle."

"But there are many things beside racial spirit behind technique. There is insight into the immediate soul of the subject—in landscape and portrait alike. Whistler had that to an extraordinary degree."

"A great artist does not merge himself in his subjects, he merges his subjects in himself. His personality is always greater than any single manifestation of it. He has a philosophy, a point of view. And his treatment of any subject will be distinguished by some elemental motive, deeper than personal temperament or any accidents of training and later surroundings which blends in subtle ways with all the acts and thoughts of one race in one generation. He must be something more than he knows. He must have some criterion of instinct to which he submits all aftergrowths of technique and conscious experience.

"When Monet paints a London bridge at dawn he does not for the moment become an

CHAPTER V

Americans abroad—Whistler's butterfly—Sargent on ostrich plumes—The *reductio ad absurdum*—Racial necessities—Too much comparison—"Fleet Street"—Asphodels in reality—"Yawp"—Originality and tradition—Shaw and the non-assertive—Constructive forces—Denver and Damascus.

"THE question is, why are *we* abroad—we, I mean, so far as we represent a considerable number? To use the dialect we have taken up, are we not cultivating our distraction from American life rather than our extraction from it?"

"There are plenty of reasons for an artist," returned Græling. "For instance, that in Europe he finds the premisses of an artistic life really taken for granted, that he is not expected to appear more prosperous or practical or conventional than he is, that he finds a civilization

righted up a fallen man'. I knew there was something off-colour about the tone of this, but something very difficult to analyze. I quoted it to an English friend of mine. 'Labour talk', he said. You see it implies that any man who *would* have righted up a Greek accent would necessarily have left a fallen man in the gutter."

"Yes, that's it. . . . I was thinking about the quality of this kind of fame. Talent which is developed entirely by will is bound to be a kind of exotic, having no connection with race or any reality. It is as likely as not to go off on tangents, developing into the most colossal absurdities, so colossal that as with Barnum and Brigham Young we have to take them seriously. . . . If these men are 'cut flowers', they are orchids with a vengeance!"

artist who feels no vital connection with some one spot of soil and the myriad forms of life that have grown out of it. He is unduly concerned with perfection of technique, ignoring the ruder elements of life itself which come to him — more and more rarely — bluntly clamouring to be expressed. He wanders like a butterfly, a gipsy without the traditions of a gipsy. He has begun like all men desiring the newness and strangeness of beauty, but unlike productive men, he has not learned to desire its humanity. As likely as not he ends by joining that vagrant multitude who are too fond of music ever to write a book, too fond of sculpture ever to paint a picture. The absolutely fatal result of unduly emphasizing the technique of an art is that after a while one hesitates to express anything in any form because it would be crystallizing once for all what one might some day have been capable of expressing better.

Every degree of fastidiousness is also a degree of stagnation."

"The same thing, I suppose, happened when Rome awoke one morning, so to speak, and found itself artistic, and went over to Greece. It always happens with young countries."

"And the sad thing is that Cato always gives in and studies Greek with the rest in spite of his seventy Roman years. . . . But after all there is nothing to be gained by it. One can really *secure* nothing in Europe of the life that must lie behind artistic expression beyond a few memories. As a newspaper man one is drawn to London by the vague wish to connect oneself with a tradition which draws us all together from the ends of the earth. It is called 'Fleet Street'. Well, I suppose we are all in search of something. We all feel that somewhere there is a romance, a poetry, a passionate life waiting for us. The vague ideal of every soul that has a

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"So far as I can see, the chief use of having cleverness is to have some authority for despising it, and to be thus able to destroy the weapons of those who are cynical. And as for originality, it seems to me that all true originality immediately reconciles itself with tradition, has in itself the elements of tradition, and is really the shadow of tradition thrown across the future. The proof of new ideas is that they become traditional in exact ratio to their vitality. And what tradition can this originality be based upon? Can it be anything deeper than a tradition of technique? An American artist can have no true, sane originality, deeper than that of technique, which does not spring from American life."

"It seems to me that what you say about our living on our capital, 'living on our imagination without troubling to replenish it with realities', is true of the rest of the world also. It is true in a curious way of Bernard

Shaw, for example: a great man, a Swift, if you like, a great individualist. Shaw is a pseudo-social reformer, a man who, of all men, ought to be creating something positive out of the present. But he gives us stones for bread, he is irrelevant, he gives people what they foolishly fancy that they desire. If they really desired what he gives they would—I don't say love him or believe him, for plenty of true reformers are neither loved nor believed in their day—but they would find in him some really constructive comment on their own lives, something beside astonishing sparks and flashes. The old idols are shattered: Shaw is merely shattering the fragments of the ruins of the old society into smaller fragments. He is merely, in an extremely witty way, hanging, drawing, and quartering what is already dead. And the chief note of English literature to-day seems to me a pandering to the non-assertive which is the

reactionary impulse in the people from the great iconoclasts of thirty years ago. People tired of hearing Ruskin thunder, 'If you don't believe that what I say is entirely true you may as well never have lived', and even of Darwin asserting mildly, '*This* really *is* true'. And so now they like a man to say, 'This is clever enough to be true, but if you don't care for it I can put the opposite quite as wittily'. . . . No wonder socialism is abroad like a whirlwind with its dazzling dream of impossible Utopias where all shall have a definite place. We fancy that we enjoy our bewilderment, but deep down we are all longing for something definite, something absolute, something solid. The heart of the world is so numbed, so vacant that it hardly realizes how hungry it is. We need great constructors, great positive forces, someone to bind together the estranged fragments of society. What is a Swift who is not counteracted by an Addison?

And is Hall Caine the best refuge the people can find from Bernard Shaw?"

"As you say, the trouble comes from living on the past or rather on reactions from the past—which is negative. And the need is a constructive force in the present—which is positive. And a constructive force is composed less of mind, like Shaw, than of heart, which feels and which compels. But before one can feel one must understand. We Americans do not feel the inspiration of American life because we shut ourselves off from understanding it. Everything in America is in a state of distraction, of divorce. Our humour is not our life, our politics and religion are outside ourselves, we are intelligent without instinct. And we further divorce ourselves by living abroad. . . . We consider it more honourable to trade than to create, whereas the farmer who produces wheat and barley is nearer the civilized ideal than the broker who negotiates them in Wall

Street. By his labour he is actually bringing something into the world, not merely transferring something already produced. And the artist also creates.

"But I think a day will come when the names of Denver and Sioux City will have a traditional and antique dignity like Damascus and Perugia—and when it will not seem to us grotesque that they have."

THE END.

Appendix

SINCE writing this I have been struck by an incomparable passage in Vernon Lee's latest volume, a comment on Emerson which links the idea I have expressed more deeply with American life: "This vital energy in Emerson's teaching is, I think, given free play only if we liberate it from notions which belonged not to Emerson's mind, but to his intellectual surroundings. His transcendentalism, horrified at science and *despising utility*, arises in great measure from the old metaphysical and theological habit of *regarding the soul as a ready-made, separate entity*, come, Heaven knows whence, *utterly unconnected with the things among which it alights*, and struggling perpetually to be rid of them and return somehow to its unknown place of origin.

Had Emerson suspected, as we have reason to suspect, that the soul is born of the soul, *its fibre the fibre of every plant and animal*, its breath the breath of every wind, its shape the shape left vacant by other shapes, he would not have been obliged to arrange *a purely intellectual transcendental habitation* for this supposed exile from another sphere. And his intuition of a possible universal life would have been strengthened, not damaged, by the knowledge that our soul is moulded into its form—nay, takes its very quality, from surrounding circumstances; and the probability, therefore, that *between the soul and its surroundings there will be a growing relation and harmony*, as of product and producer, concave and convex." (From *Gospels of Anarchy and other Contemporary Studies.*) I have italicized the words and phrases which bear particularly on various points throughout this book.

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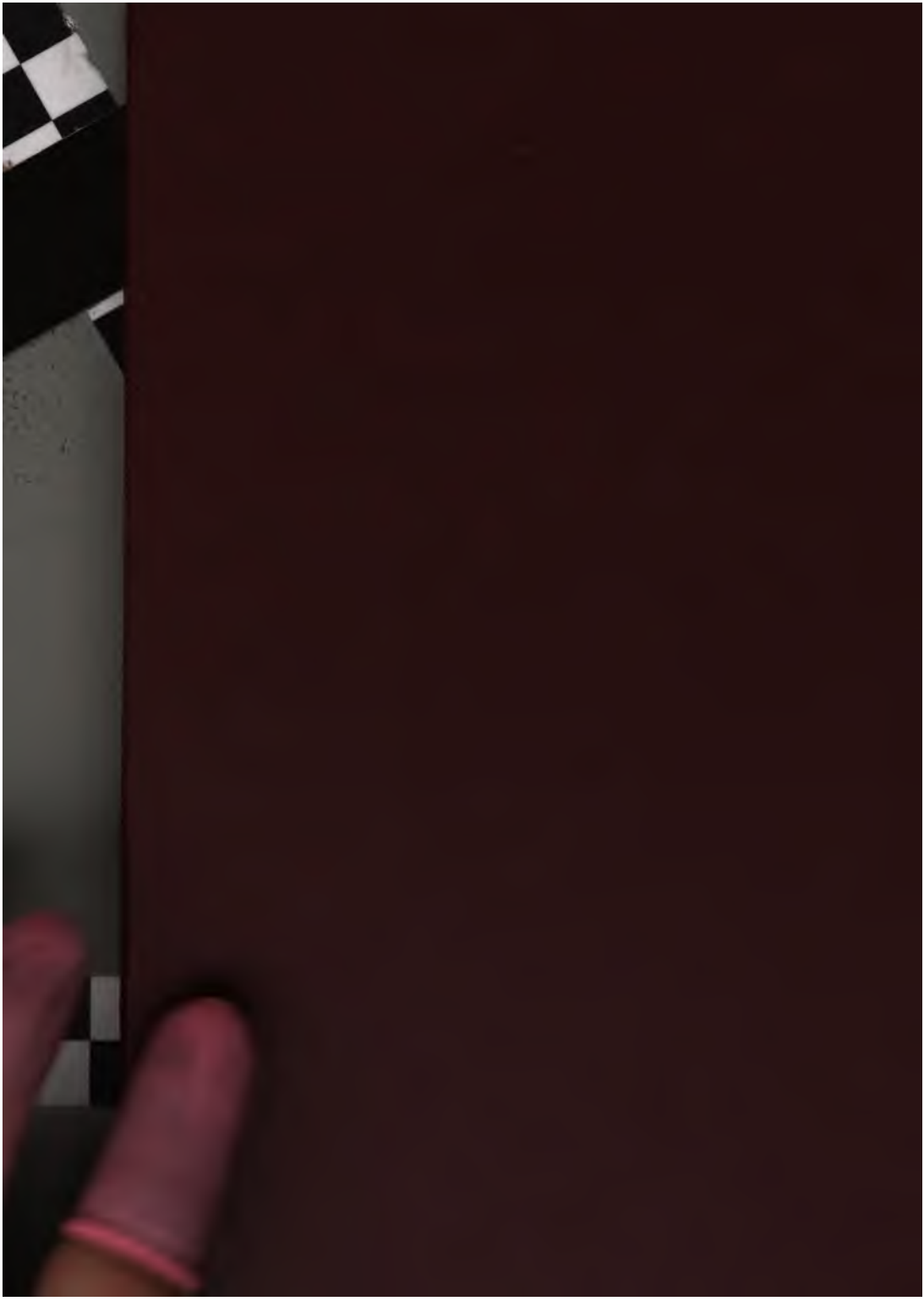
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